Mullica Watershed Planning Project Permanent Land Protection Technical Focus Group Meeting - April 30, 2002 Summary of Discussion

<u>TFG Members Attending</u> (* indicates Steering Committee member)

Michael Bell (MB), The Nature Conservancy

Jody Carrara (JoC), ANJEC

Jamie Cromartie (JaC), Stockton College

Jorge Coppen (JC), USFWS

Emile DeVito (ED), NJ Conservation Foundation

Lt. Colonel John Elwood (JE), Warren Grove

Helen Heinrich (HH), NJ Farm Bureau

Michael Kennish (MK), Rutgers Institute of Marine & Coastal Sciences

Carleton Montgomery (CM), Pinelands Preservation Alliance

Jack Ross (JR), PDC Bank

Dan Schiffhauer (DS), Ocean Spray Cranberries

Andrew Windisch (AW), NJDEP Natural Areas Program

Pinelands Commission Staff Attending

Larry Liggett [LLL] (moderator)

John Stokes [JCS]

Chris Krupka [CK]

Rich Federman [RF]

[indicates comments made by staff]

(indicates comments made by members of the public)

Question: Do we know what land has been protected in the Watershed?

- (ED) Data from municipalities, counties, State, NJPC, non-profits all available & fairly accurate ... difficult to portray information on one map ... also hard to keep updated.
- (MB) It would be helpful to have one place to report acquisitions and land holdings to, perhaps the Pinelands Commission.
- (JR) Green Acres has comprehensive mapping ... NJPC could serve as clearinghouse for PLP information.

Question: Do we have a good understanding of ecosystem boundaries?

- (AW) Watershed and ecosystem boundaries are different ... plant communities are the most useful unit for delineation ... also can use firesheds (streams are boundaries).
 - [Are there different units for wetlands?]
- (JC) Sub-basins are good units ... key is looking at ecological processes that drive how the sub-basin works.
- (ED) NJCF takes a broader perspective ... don't do much management in NJ ... need money to manage by sub-basins and current funding is "drop in bucket" ... should focus on contiguous

- forest, high water quality areas, land in danger or sprawl.
- (JC) Look at a map of disturbed site indicator species ... focus on sub-basins, locate source of problems and work toward remediation.
- (CM) Sub-watershed has to be focus for how we break down the WMA ... also need to focus on nonpoint source pollution.

Question: Are there any keystone T/E species in the Mullica we should focus on?

- (AW) Focus on ecosystems, habitat types with assemblages of species not individual species.
- (MB) Agree but perhaps in developed areas we can focus on specific species ... small fragmented habitats supporting T/E species (Atlantic County)
- (MK) Great Bay is most pristine estuary in NJ ... want to maintain its present state ... Mullica doesn't contribute much nutrient load to the Bay ... anything entering the Bay will alter bio-productivity ... phytoplankton blooms in LEH ... N. Barnegat Bay has seen population shifts due to high levels of nutrients associated with development ... Rutgers is focusing on an ecosystem approach ... looking at shifts in habitat around estuary ... Great Bay can serve as a reference site due to pristine nature ... tracking various populations (microorganisms, fish, etc.).

Question: What is the current state of biodiversity in the Watershed?

- (MB) Mapping on a by-species basis (?)
- (JoC) Focus on prioritizing areas.
- (MB) Mullica Watershed is in great shape ... not that much to target for PLP ... see what areas are most threatened by development ... target specific parcels ... looking at sub-watersheds or T/E sites might be more helpful for management than for land acquisition.
- (JE) Warren Grove is starting work on a species inventory.
 - [How do current conditions compare to historical biodiversity?]
- (AW) Biodiversity today is comparable to historical levels.
- (ED) Focus on pie charts (water quality indicators) from Mullica Report ... are red dots associated with longstanding ag use or recent expansion of development?
 - [We don't know some impacts may be residual, especially where streams are fed by groundwater.]
- (HH) Very little information has been presented about agriculture ... Ag Statistical Service has records going back to 1900 ... we need a better map of agricultural operations ... present programs for farmers including density transfer, easements is ag land being saved ? ... we need to focus on programs with incentives for farmers to manage the land rather than thinking that "some government entity has to own it" ... need to show preserved agricultural land on a map.

- [The map handed out & displayed in the GIS demonstration pretty well covers all protected land, including farms ... SADC properties not shown because they are not protected yet.]
- (ED) Opportunities exist for stream protection projects using funding for small-scale restoration projects
- (JoC) A new map showing preserved land, farms, T/E, municipal boundaries & major roads would be helpful.
- Question: What are the issues in the Watershed? Given that the CMP allows for mixed uses in the Pinelands, what issues surround development, agricultural use, and recreation?
- (CM) Restore and protect water quality ... don't ignore developed and ag areas as they might be where action is most needed ... make the tools associated with the Plan more compatible with ecosystem health ... reduce the environmental impact of the development that we approve.
 - [Keep in mind that the other 4 TFGs will be addressing many of these issues.]
- (JoC) Golf courses are a major source of degradation ... also stormwater management is a problem, especially with older developments and shopping centers.
- (JaC) The general effects of development must be considered ... what are the water quality standards in the Pinelands? ... they should be the focus of our efforts & evaluations ... the Clean Water Act addresses nonpoint source pollutants.

 [TMDLs may address these issues]
- (JaC) We need to enforce our initiatives ... the only way is through water quality standards ... BMPs need to be enforced by law ... what is the "designated use" of the Mullica River?
- (CM) It's hard to know what we are trying to achieve ... Pinelands water quality standards aren't specific ... the Mullica Report spells out what we need to look at in terms of pH, conductance, nutrients ... we should use these as targets.
- (JaC) 303(d) list inaccuracies are another problem.
 - [We need to educate the public on this point revise BATS training in schools so children aren't taking away the erroneous message that Pinelands streams are impaired.]
- (Dave Rosenblatt NJDEP) DEP is open to using NJPC studies as a basis for reevaluating Pinelands streams designations.
- (ED) Note that the presence of wetlands agriculture in tributaries hasn't turned green dots to red on water quality maps ... we need to find out why the red dot areas are degraded development ? agriculture ? ... are preserved farms still contributing to deteriorating water quality ?
- (HH) Development & farming occur side by side and it's difficult to differentiate the impacts ... we need to pull agriculture together as an industry to implement BMPs rather than targeting specific farms ... lack of funding, technical resources for ag community makes it difficult ... CREP Program successful in other states but not in NJ yet.

- (DS) The cranberry industry has begun using technology (GPS, GIS) to manage land ... consumptive water use by cranberry farmers is widely misunderstood ... most of the water simply passes through the system and is not lost.
 - [Can you bring information on water use to the group ?]
- (ED) Berry ag may be having detrimental effects short of wholesale population shifts.
- (MK) The impact of urban development far outweighs that of agriculture ... impervious cover is the key, we should do mapping and track changes in impervious cover ... Hammonton Creek is one of the most degraded streams in the Pinelands ... still seeing impacts of chicken farms in groundwater.
- (JaC) What about turf farms they use a great deal of fertilizer?
- (JoC) Consider the soils.
- (HH) It is difficult to get sod (turf) farmers involved in their programs ... turf farming is increasing, animal farming very rare now ... need farm by farm research.
- (MK) More fertilizer is put on residential lawns than on farms.
- (JC) Indirect impacts are important fragmentation, destruction of ecological processes, reduction of T/E species ... fire suppression also an issue.
- (CM) The Mullica Report spells out the impacts of urban & ag land use ... both are important factors.
- (ED) We need to look at the impact of preserved farms ... leverage our efforts through Action Now funding and partnerships.
- (ED) ORV use is the major recreational threat to the Watershed ... need the State to step up enforcement of ORV laws ... NJCF is restoring some ORV sites but it will never be a compatible use ... maybe some old gravel pits or the like can be found for this purpose.
- (JC) Recreation is a major issue at the Forsythe Refuge with 200,000+ visitors annually ... Holgate is especially a hot spot ... situation is confused by the fact that the Refuge Manager has to interpret the law.
- (CM) ORVs and power boats in the lower Mullica are the 2 big recreational issues.
- (ED) Maintaining the River for canoes and kayaks is also a problem by removing entanglements the wetlands are quickly drained ... this is destroying White Cedar swamps.
- (MK) Jet skis in the Great Bay are also a concern.

Question: Are protected lands adequately managed?

(JE) Disturbance & degradation are not the same thing ... disturbed land can host a variety of T/E species ... they take a fireshed approach ... fire management is key to Pine Barrens - without it they would become oak forest ... they are currently expanding the boundaries of their fire

- management program.
- (AW) Also use a fireshed approach ... trying to expand into other parts of the Pinelands just finished fireshed plans for West Plains, working in East Plains, Batsto Natural Area ... Fireshed Management Plans ... bulldozing of fire breaks might be an issue.
 - [Can you provide the group with maps of vegetative types ?]
- (JE) Resources are needed to maintain the fire breaks.
- (DS) Growers use controlled burns ... deal with recreational access issues on a case by case basis most of their properties are inaccessible wetlands ... occasional ORV users.

Question: What are the major issues in the Watershed pertaining to water quality, water quantity, and ecosystem health?

- (JC) Riparian buffers in the Watershed are mostly in good shape ... NPS contaminants are the key focus ... "pulsed" systems lead to changes in streamflow which cause changes in species composition.
- (JaC) Tidal areas are sensitive to changes in streamflow.
- (MK) Great Bay salinity has increased due to the drought ... shifts ecosystems ... fragmities a key indicator.
- (ED) Invasive species will enter any stream that has been degraded ... examples at point sources & just downstream, at spots where highways cross streams, areas of human disturbance ... invasives are already in seed banks, they just need impairment of the stream conditions to establish a foothold ... no money has been spent to combat invasive species.

Question: What land in the Watershed should be targeted for permanent protection?

- (MB) Targeting specific parcels is easier here due to high % of protected land ... we should coordinate our efforts to protect what's already been targeted.
- (JR) Targets should be tied to degraded sites ... we can think about expanding the PDC Program to protect different areas of land ... remaining 502 funding should be released to the State for Pinelands use ... we should continue to give guidance to Green Acres on targets.
- (JoC) Look at growth areas for targets ... stream corridors.
- (AW) Continue working on infill targets around State forests.
- (ED) We need to look at the area south of the Mullica River ... subdivided land in the Forest Area needs to be addressed ... Elwood Corridor a biological connector.
- (JE) We need a regional Fireshed Management Plan.
- (HH) The SADC is trying to chop away at the Farmland Preservation Program ... farms should be clustered ... community wastewater systems need to be introduced, also more use of the Density Transfer Program ... key is educating the public.

(ED) Displayed and presented to NJPC his Elwood Corridor map.

Public Comment

(Steve Jacobus)

The regulatory aspect of the process will involve using the watershed management plans to amend existing WQMPs ... DEPs objective is to address issues locally/regionally through the watershed planning process rather than on a "one size fits all" statewide basis.

(general public)

- ? property rights
- ? definition of wetlands
- ? pine trees are a renewable resource
- ? aim of plan is to get rid of the people in the Watershed
- ? meetings not properly advertised
- ? problems in Little Egg Harbor with septic systems and man-made lagoons, septic violations & wetlands, leaching pollutants into storm drains running into creek [explore in Wastewater TFG?]
- ? trying to acquire properties bounded by refuge in LEH
- ? pay attention to the economic impacts of our actions through the Watershed Planning Project, especially in towns without RGAs (Mullica Twp.) [Sustainable Development TFG will look at economic impacts.]
- (ED) Mayor of Mullica wants Green Acres to acquire more land in order to receive more funding through In Lieu of Taxes Program.
- (JC) FWS recognizes importance of property rights, only accepts land from willing sellers ... conservation easements are win-win arrangements since landowner keeps the property.

ACTION ITEMS / NEXT STEPS

- 1. Pinelands Commission staff will work with appropriate TFG members and other experts to obtain requested data/information:
 - List of target parcels for land acquisition
 - Watershed map showing preserved land, farms, threatened & endangered species, municipal boundaries and major roads
 - Watershed map of vegetative types

The information obtained will be used to develop additional Action Now projects as appropriate.

2. <u>Potential Action Now Projects:</u>

- Research project to determine whether stream impairments can be attributed to longstanding agricultural uses or recent expansion of development.
- Identify and implement small-scale stream restoration projects.

∠ Identify locations and impacts of turf farms on water quality; identify and implement BMPs.

- 3. Commission staff will explore idea of acting as clearinghouse for permanent land protection information.
- 4. Commission staff will share data/information and recommendations with TFG members, the Steering Committee and the public and solicit input.
- 5. Commission staff will work with watershed partners to implement recommendations.
- 6. Next TFG meeting will be organized to review progress and solicit additional expert input.